

CHAPTER 13

The next ceremonial uncleanness is that of the leprosy, concerning which the law was very large and particular; we have the discovery of it in this chapter, and the cleansing of the leper in the next. Scarcely any one thing in all the levitical law takes up so much room as this.

I. Rules are here given by which the priest must judge whether the man had the leprosy or no, according as the symptom was that appeared.

1. If it was a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot (v. 1-17).
2. If it was a bile (v. 18-23).
3. If it was in inflammation (v. 24-28).
4. If it was in the head or beard (v. 29-37).
5. If it was a bright spot (v. 38, 39).
6. If it was in a bald head (v. 40-44).

II. Direction is given how the leper must be disposed of (v. 45, 46).

III. Concerning the leprosy in garments (v. 47, etc.).

~~OLD~~ LEVITICUS 13:1-17

THE LAW CONCERNING LEPROSY

I. Concerning the plague of leprosy we may observe in general,

1. That it was rather an uncleanness than a disease; or, at least, so the law considered it, and therefore employed not the physicians but the priests about it. Christ is said to cleanse lepers, not to cure them. We do not read of any that died of the leprosy, but it rather buried them alive, by rendering them unfit for conversation with any but such as were infected like themselves. Yet there is a tradition that Pharaoh, who sought to kill Moses, was the first that ever was struck with this disease, and that he died of it. It is said to have begun first in Egypt, whence it spread into Syria. It was very well known to Moses, when he put his own hand into his bosom and took it out leprous.

2. That it was a plague inflicted immediately by the hand of God, and came not from natural causes, as other diseases; and therefore must be managed according to a divine law. Miriam's leprosy, and Gehazi's, and king Uzziah's, were all the punishments of particular sins: and, if generally it was so, no marvel there was so much care taken to distinguish it from a common distemper, that none might be looked upon as lying under this extraordinary token of divine displeasure but those that really were so.

3. That it is a plague not now known in the world; what is commonly called the leprosy is of a quite different nature. This seems to have been reserved as a particular scourge for the sinners of those times and places. The Jews retained the idolatrous customs they had learnt in Egypt, and therefore God justly caused this with some others of the diseases of Egypt to follow them. Yet we read of Naaman the Syrian, who was a leper, ~~1~~2 Kings 5:1.

4. That there were other breakings-out in the body which did very much resemble the leprosy, but were not it, which might make a man sore and loathsome and yet not ceremonially unclean. Justly are our bodies called vile bodies, which have in them the seeds of so many diseases, by which the lives of so many are made bitter to them.

5. That the judgment of it was referred to the priests. Lepers were looked upon as stigmatized by the justice of God, and therefore it was left to his servants the priests, who might be presumed to know his mark best, to pronounce who were lepers and who were not. All the Jews say, "Any priest, though disabled by a blemish to attend the sanctuary, might be a judge of the leprosy, provided the blemish were not in his eye. And he might" (they say) "take a common person to assist him in the search, but the priest only must pronounce the judgment."

6. That it was a figure of the moral pollution of men's minds by sin, which is the leprosy of the soul, defiling to the conscience, and from which Christ alone can cleanse us; for herein the power of his grace infinitely transcends that of the legal priesthood, that the priest could only convict the leper (for by the law is the knowledge of sin), but Christ can cure the leper, he can take away sin. *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*, which was more than the priests could do, ~~1~~Matthew 8:2. Some think that the leprosy signified, not so much sin in general as a state of sin, by which men are separated from God (their spot not being the spot of God's children), and scandalous sin, for which men are to be shut out from the

communion of the faithful. It is a work of great importance, but of great difficulty, to judge of our spiritual state: we have all cause to suspect ourselves, being conscious to ourselves of sores and spots, but whether clean or unclean is the question. A man might have a scab (v. 6) and yet be clean: the best have their infirmities; but, as there were certain marks by which to know that it was a leprosy, so there are characters of such as are in the gall of bitterness, and the work of ministers is to declare the judgment of leprosy and to assist those that suspect themselves in the trial of their spiritual state, remitting or retaining sin. And hence the keys of the kingdom of heaven are said to be given to them, because they are to separate between the precious and the vile, and to judge who are fit as clean to partake of the holy things and who as unclean must be debarred from them.

II. Several rules are here laid down by which the judgment of the priest must be governed.

- 1.** If the sore was but *skin-deep*, it was to be hoped it was not the *leprosy*, v. 4. But, if it was *deeper than the skin*, the man must be pronounced unclean, v. 3. The infirmities that consist with grace do not sink deep into the soul, but *the mind still serves the law of God*, and the *inward man delights in it*, ^{<8172>}Romans 7:22, 25. But if the matter be really worse than it shows, and the inwards be infected, the case is dangerous.
- 2.** If the sore *be at a stay*, and do not *spread*, it is no leprosy, v. 4, 5. But if it *spread much abroad*, and continue to do so after several inspections, the case is bad, v. 7, 8. If men do not grow worse, but a stop be put to the course of their sins and their corruptions be checked, it is to be hoped they will grow better; but if sin get ground, and they become worse every day, they are going downhill.
- 3.** If there was *proud raw flesh* in the rising, the priest needed not to wait any longer, it was certainly a leprosy, v. 10, 11. Nor is there any surer indication of the badness of a man's spiritual state than the heart's rising in self-conceit, confidence in the flesh, and resistance of the reproofs of the word and strivings of the Spirit.
- 4.** If the eruption, whatever it was, *covered all the skin* from head to foot, it was no leprosy (v. 12, 13); for it was an evidence that the vitals were sound and strong, and nature hereby helped itself, throwing out what was burdensome and pernicious. There is hope in the small-pox when they

come out well: so if men freely confess their sins, and hide them not, there is no danger comparable to theirs that cover their sins. Some gather this from it, that there is more hope of the profane than of hypocrites. The publicans and harlots went into the kingdom of heaven before scribes and Pharisees. In one respect, the sudden breakings-out of passion, though bad enough, are not so dangerous as malice concealed. Others gather this, that, if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged; if we see and own that there is *no health in us, no soundness in our flesh*, by reason of sin, we shall *find grace in the eyes of the Lord*.

5. The priest must take time in making his judgment, and not give it rashly. If the matter looked suspicious, he must shut up the patient seven days, and then seven days more, that his judgment might be *according to truth*. This teaches all, both ministers and people, not to be hasty in their censures, nor to judge any thing *before the time*. If *some men's sins go before unto judgment*, the sins of others *follow after*, and so men's good works; therefore let nothing be done *suddenly*, ^{<4E2>}1 Timothy 5:22, 24, 25.

6. If the person suspected was found to be clean, yet he must *wash his clothes* (v. 6), because he had been under the suspicion, and there had been in him that which gave ground for the suspicion. Even the prisoner that is acquitted must go down on his knees. We have need to be washed in the blood of Christ from our spots, though they be not leprosy-spots; for who can say, *I am pure from sin?* though there are those who through grace are *innocent from the great transgression*.

~~<0E3>~~ LEVITICUS 13:18-37

THE LAW CONCERNING LEPROSY

The priest is here instructed what judgment to make if there was any appearance of a leprosy, either,

1. In an old ulcer, or bile, that has been healed, v. 18, etc. When old sores, that seemed to be cured, break out again, it is to be feared there is a leprosy in them; such is the danger of those who, having escaped the pollutions of the world, are again *entangled therein and overcome*. Or,

2. In a burn by accident, for this seems to be meant, v. 24, etc. The burning of strife and contention often proves the occasion of the rising up and

breaking out of that corruption which witnesses to men's faces that they are unclean.

3. In a scall-head. And in this commonly the judgment turned upon a very small matter. If the hair in the scall was black, it was a sign of soundness; if yellow, it was an indication of a leprosy, v. 30-37. The other rules in these cases are the same with those mentioned before. In reading of these several sorts of ailments, it will be good for us,

- 1.** To lament the calamitous state of human life, which lies exposed to so many grievances. What troops of diseases are we beset with on every side! and they all entered by sin.
- 2.** To give thanks to God if he has never afflicted us with any of these sores: if the constitution is healthful, and the body lively and easy, we are bound to glorify God with our bodies.

~~CHES~~ LEVITICUS 13:38-46

THE LAW CONCERNING LEPROSY

We have here,

I. Provisos that neither a *freckled skin* nor a *bald head* should be mistaken for a leprosy, v. 38-41. Every deformity must not forthwith be made a ceremonial defilement. Elisha was jeered for his *bald head* (~~1~~2 Kings 2:23); but it was the children of Bethel, that knew not the judgments of their God, who turned it to his reproach.

II. A particular brand set upon the leprosy if at any time it did appear in a *bald head*: *The plague is in his head, he is utterly unclean*, v. 44. If the leprosy of sin have seized the head, if the judgment be corrupted, and wicked principles which countenance and support wicked practices, be embraced, it is an *utter uncleanness*, from which few are ever cleansed. Soundness in the faith keeps the leprosy from the head, and saves conscience from being shipwrecked.

III. Directions what must be done with the convicted leper. When the priest, upon mature deliberation, had solemnly pronounced him unclean,

1. He must pronounce himself so, v. 45. He must put himself into the posture of a mourner and cry, *Unclean, unclean*. The leprosy was not itself a sin, but it was a sad token of God's displeasure and a sore affliction to him that was under it. It was a reproach to his name, put a full stop to his business in the world, cut him off from conversation with his friends and relations, condemned him to banishment till he was cleansed, shut him out from the sanctuary, and was, in effect, the ruin of all the comfort he could have in this world. Heman, it would seem, either was a leper or alludes to the melancholy condition of a leper, ^{<388>}Psalm 88:8, etc. He must therefore,

(1.) Humble himself under the mighty hand of God, not insisting upon his cleanness when the priest had pronounced him unclean, but justifying God and accepting the *punishment of his iniquity*. He must signify this by *rending his clothes, uncovering his head, and covering his upper lip*, all tokens of shame and confusion of face, and very significant of that self-loathing and self-abasement which should fill the hearts of penitents, the language of which is self-judging. Thus must we take to ourselves the shame that belongs to us, and with broken hearts call ourselves by our own name, *Unclean, unclean* — heart unclean, life unclean, unclean by original corruption, unclean by actual transgression — unclean, and therefore worthy to be for ever excluded from communion with God, and all hope of happiness in him. *We are all as an unclean thing* (^{<2646>}Isaiah 64:6) — unclean, and therefore undone, if infinite mercy do not interpose.

(2.) He must give warning to others to take heed of coming near him. Wherever he went, he must cry to those he saw at a distance, “*I am unclean, unclean, take heed of touching me.*” Not that the leprosy was catching, but by the touch of a leper ceremonial uncleanness was contracted. Every one therefore was concerned to avoid it; and the leper himself must give notice of the danger. And this was all that the law could do, in that it was weak through the flesh; it taught the leper to cry, *Unclean, unclean*, but the gospel has put another cry into the lepers' mouths, ^{<4712>}Luke 17:12, 13, where we find ten lepers crying with a loud voice, *Jesus, Master, have mercy on us*. The law only shows us our disease; the gospel shows us our help in Christ.

2. He must then be shut out of the camp, and afterwards, when they came to Canaan, out of the city, town, or village, where he lived, and *dwell alone* (v. 46), associating with none but those that were lepers like himself. When king Uzziah became a leper, he was banished from his

palace, and *dwelt in a separate house*, ^{<117>}2 Chronicles 26:21. And see ^{<117>}2 Kings 7:3. This typified the purity which ought to be preserved in the gospel church, by the solemn and authoritative exclusion of scandalous sinners, that hate to be reformed, from the communion of the faithful. *Put away from among yourselves that wicked person*, ^{<117>}1 Corinthians 5:13.

^{<117>}LEVITICUS 13:47-59

THE LAW CONCERNING LEPROSY

This is the law concerning the plague of leprosy in a garment, whether linen or woollen. A leprosy in a garment, with discernible indications of it, the colour changed by it, the garment fretted, the nap worn off, and this in some one particular part of the garment, and increasing when it was shut up, and not to be got out by washing is a thing which to us now is altogether unaccountable. The learned confess that it was a sign and a miracle in Israel, an extraordinary punishment inflicted by the divine power, as a token of great displeasure against a person or family.

1. The process was much the same with that concerning a leprous person. The garment suspected to be tainted was not to be burnt immediately, though, it may be, there would have been no great loss of it; for in no case must sentence be given merely upon a surmise, but it must be *shown to the priest*. If, upon search, it was found that there was a *leprous spot* (the Jews say no bigger than a bean), it must be *burnt*, or at least that part of the garment in which the spot was, v. 52, 57. If the cause of the suspicion was gone, it must be *washed*, and then might be used, v. 58.

2. The signification also was much the same, to intimate the great malignity there is in sin: it not only defiles the sinner's conscience, but it brings a stain upon all his employments and enjoyments, all he has and all he does. *To those that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure*, ^{<117>}Titus 1:15. And we are taught hereby to hate even *the garments spotted with the flesh*, ^{<117>}Jude 1:23. Those that make their clothes servants to their pride and lust may see them thereby tainted with a leprosy, and doomed to the fire, ^{<117>}Isaiah 3:18-24. But the ornament of *the hidden man of the heart is incorruptible*, ^{<117>}1 Peter 3:4. The robes of righteousness never fret nor are moth-eaten.